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Population and housing censuses

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted to the Statistical Commission in accordance with a request of the Commission at its thirty-sixth session.[a] It summarizes activities regarding the role of the United Nations Statistics Division as secretariat of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses; work on the revision and update of the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* by a United Nations expert group, specifically the recommendations of the expert group meeting held in New York from 22 to 26 August 2005; the adoption by the Economic and Social Council of resolution 2005/13 on the 2010 World Programme; and the coordination of regional activities in preparation for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses.

[a] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2004, Supplement No. 4* (E/2005/24-E/CN.3/2005/27), chap. IV, para. 12.

* E/CN.3/2006/1.

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I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-sixth session, the Statistical Commission requested that the United Nations Statistics Division proceed with its work on the revision and update of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* by convening an expert group meeting on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses; that the Division act as the umbrella body for setting standards; and that the umbrella strategy evolve around regional arrangements.

II. Setting up the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses

2. In its resolution 2005/13, the Economic and Social Council emphasized the three main goals of the 2010 World Programme: conducting at least one population and housing census in every country or area in the period 2005-2014; producing an updated version of the *Principles and Recommendations*; and providing a platform for the comprehensive exchange of experience, participation by countries, technical assistance, information and data dissemination. The resolution provides a clear mandate to proceed with the implementation of the 2010 World Programme.

3. In the reporting period, the United Nations Statistics Division, in its work on the revision of the *Principles and Recommendations* and following the recommendations of an expert group on the 2010 World Programme, developed a framework of three working groups and a drafting group, with each working group focusing on specific component parts of the principles and recommendations: (a) standards, framework and a core set of topics; (b) census planning and management; and (c) promotion of censuses. An interactive electronic forum was also established to facilitate the exchange of opinions, comments and suggestions.[1]

4. Based on those preparations, the Division convened an expert group meeting on the 2010 World Programme in New York from 22 to 26 August 2005. The report of that meeting is available as a background document in the room and on the Division's website.[2] The expert group endorsed the activities conducted to date, such as establishing and operating an interactive discussion forum and e-mail system for the 2010 World Programme; the online collection of questionnaires for the 2000 round of censuses; special issues of the *Demographic Yearbook* on population censuses; and the development of the Census Metadata Database. In response to the expert group's recommendation regarding presenting data on the website, a technical subgroup on alternative designs designed a separate area on the Division's website to provide information on national practices related to alternative census designs.[3] Also, census questionnaires from 133 population and/or housing censuses used for the 2000 round of censuses have been scanned and posted on the same website,[4] providing a methodological base for building on past experience.

5. Also, participants endorsed the inclusion in the revised *Principles and Recommendations* of a core set of topics to be collected and of outputs that every country should produce at least once in the period 2005-2014. That core set of outputs, designed with the aim of presenting a detailed national profile at the lowest geographical level at a given point in time, is required for planning national policy and distribution of resources; research and advocacy; monitoring the goals that form the basis of the recommendations of major international conferences; and improved

national and international comparability. In implementing that recommendation, a technical subgroup on the core set of topics and tabulations of the expert group on the 2010 World Programme met in Dublin from 13 to 15 October 2005 and proposed a central building block, consisting of 41 recommended tabulations and featuring 33 core topics that each country or area would need to generate at least once in the period 2005-2014.[5] The United Nations Statistics Division developed a strategy to introduce the central building block at regional and subregional meetings, thus responding to the request of the Statistical Commission concerning the coordination of population and housing census data dissemination and international and intraregional comparability.

6. In emphasizing civil registration and vital statistics as essential components of the 2010 World Programme, the United Nations Statistics Division continued related activities by substantially servicing a workshop on the theme "Strengthening the capacity of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member States: improvement of statistics on fertility and mortality", held in Georgetown from 4 to 6 April 2005; participating at an international meeting of directors of national statistics and national health statistics, held in Buenos Aires on 21 and 22 November 2005; and issuing regularly, in hard copy[6] (semi-annually) and on the website (bi-weekly)[7] the *Population and Vital Statistics Report*, featuring basic statistics from population censuses and civil registration. In the field of international migration statistics from administrative sources, a new *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaire was developed and disseminated to all national statistical offices in 2005 and the Division provided substantial support to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) by conducting an expert group meeting on international migration statistics in Cairo, from 14 to 16 November 2005.

7. In implementing the 2010 World Programme, the regional commissions undertook the activities described below.

8. The activities of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) related to the implementation of the 2010 World Programme involve participation in the work of the expert group on the 2010 World Programme. In an attempt to summarize experience from the 2000 round of censuses in Africa, ECA administered a questionnaire to the 53 national statistical authorities; approximately 23 per cent provided replies. ECA participated in the initial meeting on implementation of the 2010 World Programme organized by the United Nations Statistics Division in Yaoundé, on 25 November 2005. ECA is participating in a regional meeting on the 2010 round of censuses scheduled to be held in South Africa and expected to address issues relevant to the *Principles and Recommendations* and the implementation of the 2010 World Programme.

9. In implementing the 2010 World Programme, the Statistical Division of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), in collaboration with the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) and under the work programme of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES), has continued the preparation of the *Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing*. In December 2005, a meeting of census experts from the CES countries was held to review the first draft of the CES *Recommendations*; the meeting was jointly organized by ECE and Eurostat, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). A final draft is expected to be prepared by an ECE steering group on population and housing censuses in March 2006, for

submission to CES in June 2006. ECE is also finalizing a publication on the experience of ECE countries in carrying out their census in the 2000 round; it will provide an overview of the census methodology and technology used in the last round, as well as information on the topics included in the last round and the definitions and approaches adopted.

10. During 2005, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) made available on its website the major outcomes of a seminar held in December 2003 in Santiago on the lessons learned from the 2000 round of population and housing censuses in Latin America. Topics included census organization; coverage; cartography; training and use of sampling; new technologies; data processing; and characteristics of dwellings, households and persons. Moreover, in-depth studies were promoted and special studies on vulnerable population groups, including indigenous peoples and ethnic groups, were undertaken. Three atlases (Bolivia, Panama and Ecuador) were published, demonstrating significant gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous populations in socio-demographic indicators, including several indicators related to the Millennium Development Goals. As part of a project funded by the Inter-American Development Bank, ECLAC provided technical support to countries to promote access to and use of census databases. Currently, several Latin American and Caribbean countries allow online census data processing via the Internet. ECLAC, together with CARICOM and UNFPA, continued supporting Caribbean countries in census data processing and provided technical support to initiate census evaluation and analysis. Technical assistance has also been provided to Colombia, Nicaragua and Peru, which conducted their censuses in 2005. Finally, technical assistance has been provided to African countries for census data processing using REDATAM software developed by ECLAC, including online census data processing.

11. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) carried out during May-July 2005 a metadata survey on past experience and future plans of its member countries concerning population and housing censuses. Results of the survey were coded in a metadatabase and shared with other global partners. ESCAP participated in the revision process of the *Principles and Recommendations*. ESCAP will finalize the design of its regional programme on population and housing censuses articulated along the priority areas set out by Asia and Pacific experts: (a) planning and financing of censuses; (b) effective use of information technology and geographical information systems; (c) using the census for measuring emerging issues; and (d) analysis, dissemination and utilization of data. The regional census programme is expected to be conducted in full cooperation with global, regional, subregional and national partners.

12. In implementing the 2010 World Programme, the ESCWA Statistical Committee recommended at its sixth session the establishment of a task force on population and housing censuses. At its first meeting, held in Cairo in November 2005, the task force established its terms of reference, with support from the United Nations Statistics Division and the ESCWA Statistics Coordination Unit. In particular, the task force will provide substantial input to the process of reviewing and updating the *Principles and Recommendations*; agree on a core set of topics and outputs that should be collected from population and housing censuses to reflect the specificity of the region; and develop mechanisms to more closely coordinate national population censuses in the region. Four working groups were established to elaborate on specific issues. In addition, ESCWA established a trust fund to support

the work on population and housing censuses in the region; the Ministry of National Economy of Oman has provided funds in the amount of US$ 50,000.

Notes

[1] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/globalcensusforum/.

[2] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/CensusEGM05/ac104_L4.pdf.

[3] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/alternativeCensusDesigns.htm.

[4] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/censusquest.htm.

[5] A document containing this proposal is before the Commission as a background document.

[6] *Population and Vital Statistics Report* (United Nations publication (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.A/234-235)).

[7] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/vitstats/seriesa2.htm.